

"Strength and Peace."

A SERMON,

**PREACHED BEFORE THE DIOCESAN SYNOD OF
NOVA SCOTIA, IN ST. LUKE'S CATHEDRAL,
HALIFAX,**

JUNE 22nd, 1894,

— BY —

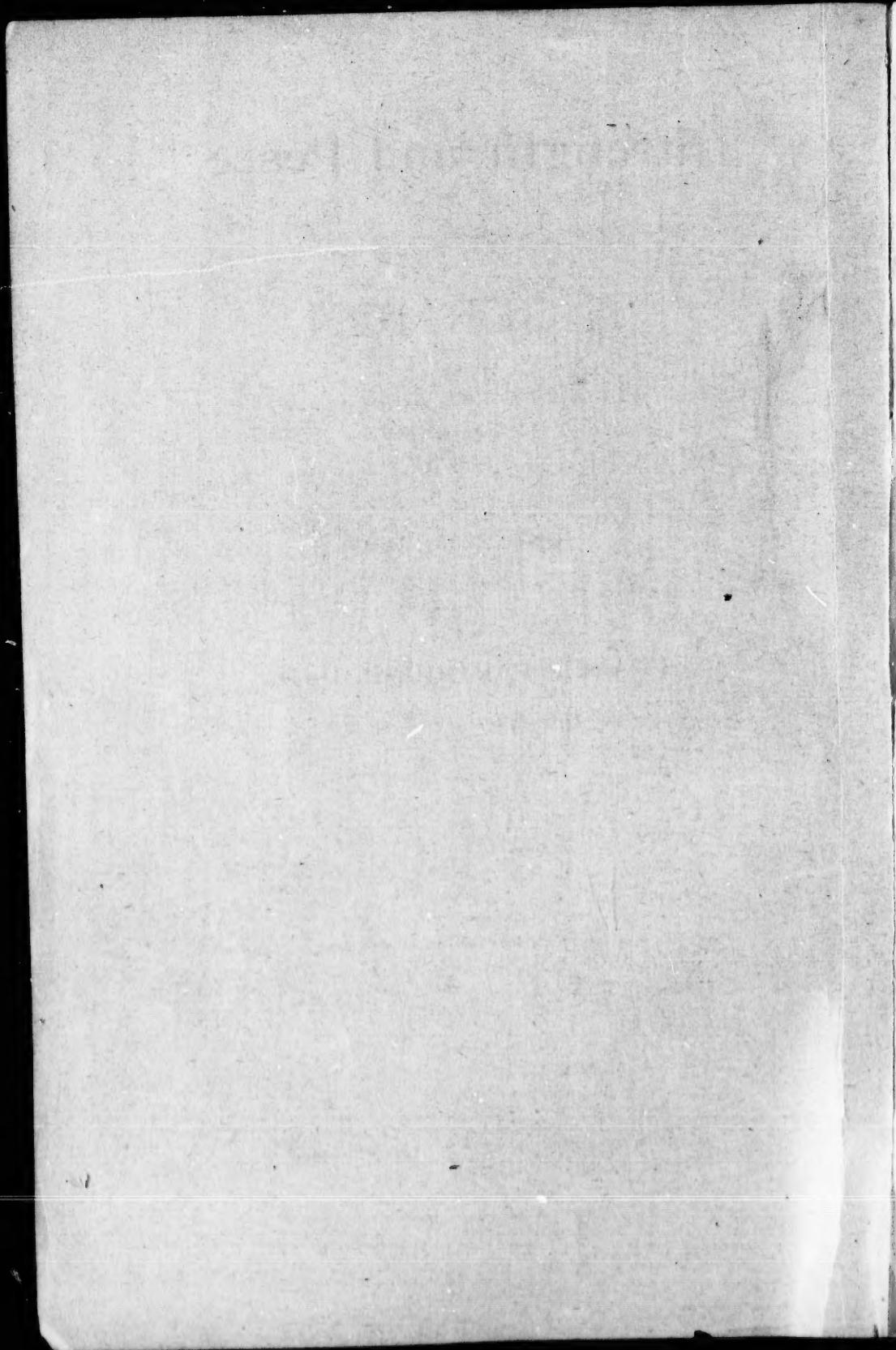
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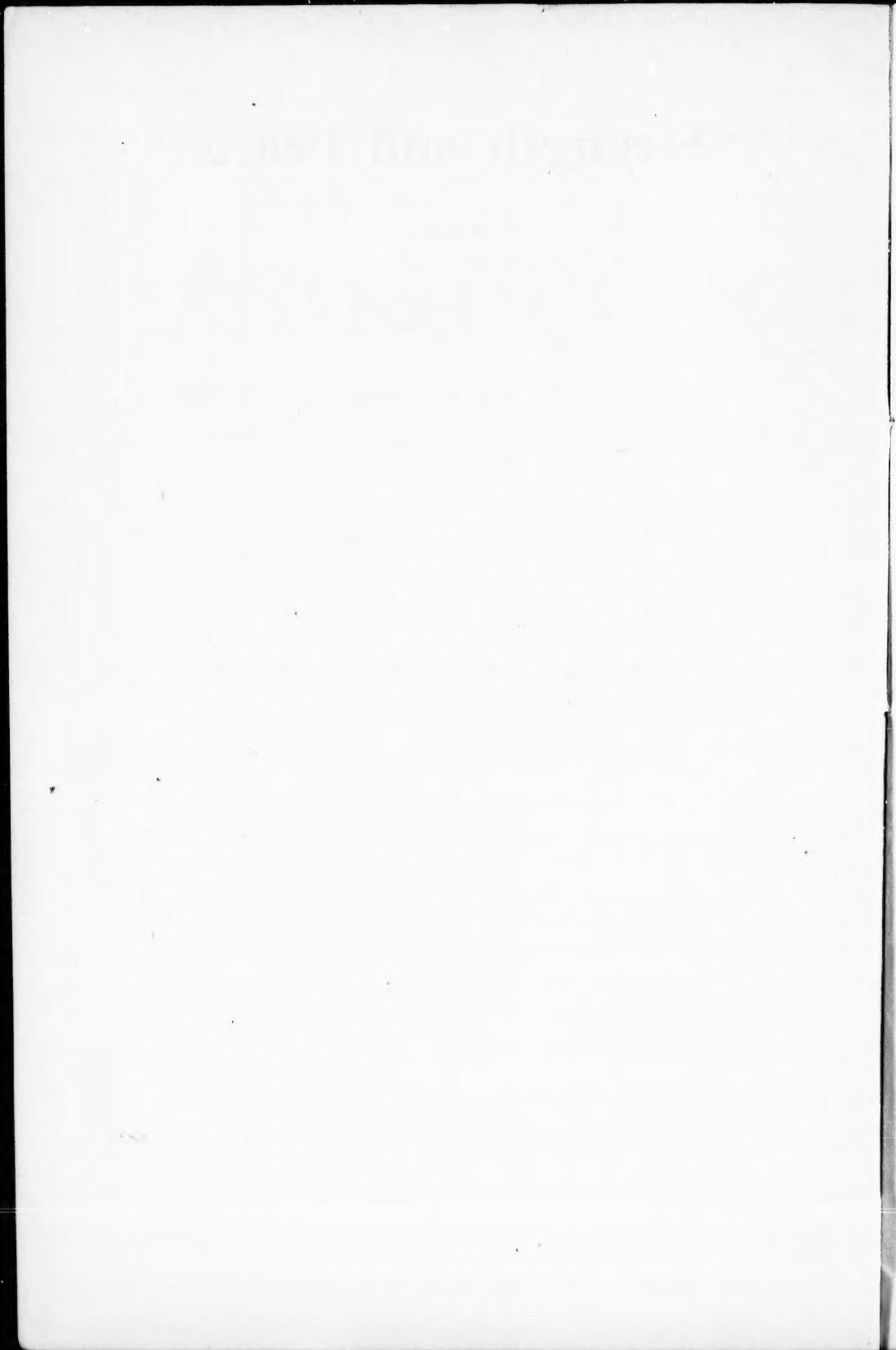
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"STRENGTH AND PEACE."

PSALM xxix. 10, 11.

THE LORD sitteth above the water flood ;
AND THE LORD remaineth a King for ever :
THE LORD shall give strength unto His people ;
THE LORD shall give His people the blessing of peace..

The Psalm is a magnificent description of the Rule of God over nature. From the rolling thunders of the storm to the birthpangs of the lower creation ; in the primeval forest and the mighty ocean ; o'er the sandy wastes of wilderness and in the recesses of the sanctuary where He is to be worshipped in the beauty of holiness : the voice of the Lord claims and exerts the pre-eminence and controlling power. Waters may rage and swell ; trees of the forest be broken in pieces ; lightnings may flash ; the tender sound be heard of the gentle hind moaning over her young ; and the sweet accents of supplication be offered in the temple courts. Yet all is in God's hand. He ruleth His whole creation. He knoweth His own. And upon the people of His loving care He in the midst of trial and danger bestows the blessing of *Strength and Peace*.

From the world of nature to the realm of the intellectual and spiritual the transition of thought is easy. And it is no small comfort to God's people now, as it has ever been in the history of the Church and the world, in the midst of all things which can arouse anxiety and create alarm, to have the abiding consciousness that the Lord sitteth upon the flood. There 's no greater source of assurance for the perplexed mind, and the soul that is sore troubled about public events,

than the study of history. The intelligent and prayerful student of the centuries that are past can place himself in imagination among the scenes and catastrophes of the world, and can feel with the actors in them the full significance of the problems pressing upon them for solution, and the gloomy forecast of the future. He can then survey the dawn arising out of darkness, the glory that succeeds the gloom; and, watching the hand and the voice of God guiding, controlling and bringing mighty things to pass, sinks to his knees at once for pardon of his faithlessness and in adoring acknowledgement of the Sovereignty of His God.

The temptation to many is to feel and declare that the present is a crisis in the history of the Church; and that never before were there so many difficulties in her path and hindrances to her progress as now. The fact is that the Church of Christ is *always at a crisis*. The closing and sealing of the stone over the dead body of the world's Redeemer; the meeting of S. Paul with the keenness and subtlety of Greek thought on Mars' Hill; the blood of virgin martyrs staining the sand in the Roman amphitheatre; the conflict of revelation with man's uncurbed reasonings when Athanasius stood against the world; the awesome yielding of a Christianity enervated by worldliness before the swift sword of Islam; the subtle disputation of the schoolmen in the realm of metaphysic in which truth swayed back and forth like a bending reed which never broke; the gradual arousing of the conscience by the spirit of God and the rising of the spiritual over the carnal in the struggles preceding the Reformation; the appalling division, the burnings and torturings, the unworthy motives and base passions which accompanied that greatest revolution since the planting of the Christian Church; the deadly somnolence and timeserving of the eighteenth century ending as it did with the human hell of the French Revolution; and in this century the startling, and in many cases probably the abiding, changes of thought

consequent upon the discoveries of science and the progress of archaeological and critical investigation :—*at what time and under what circumstances* can it be said that the Church has *not* been in a crisis ? No more so at one time than at another. And always by the good hand of her God upon her, developing arguments, evolving champions, setting up barriers, and passing the crisis. Sometimes crippled and wounded and with her best and purest as rest forever. Not always in ways expected or foreseen. Seldom with progressive results quite clearly perceived by herself. Yet ever over the waterflood the Lord sitteth. Yet in the midst of apparent confusion ; amid all the conflict, the dust, and the blood ; unholy schemes shattered, ungodly combinations rent in pieces, the world, the flesh and the devil routed and Truth and Righteousness triumphant, the LORD remaineth a King !

And can this ever on earth be otherwise ?

The Church of God is set for the defence, maintenance, and advance of certain divine principles, entrusted to her by her great Head. These principles must always be from the nature of the case opposed to the principles of the world. She must not expect the world to favor her. The more she is in favor with the world the more she will fail in her Divine Mission. Social improvement, the regeneration of society by the reform of social wrongs, is not her chief aim. She may recognize the fact that certain social conditions are more or less favourable to the right discharge of the obligations of religion. There may be forms of social or sanitary improvement with which her members may associate themselves. Temperance reform, the better housing of the poor, the improvement of workshops ; the reclaiming of the drunkard and the vicious, the encouragement of true education, the provision for wholesome recreation and such like objects may secondarily engage her attention and become her suitable labours of love. And she is by no means careless of them.

But her great commission is to preach the Gospel, and to maintain inviolate the laws of its Founder and Lord. Her great business is with the soul. To convey God's message of love and mercy to a world that lieth in wickedness ; to be the channel of God's grace to souls conscious of sin and craving for a Saviour ; to raise up them that fall ; to comfort those that mourn ; to rouse men dead in trespasses and sins, and bid them flee from the wrath to come ; to bear stedfast and unswerving testimony both by word and deed to the unchanging and unchangeable deposit of the Faith once for all delivered to the saints ; to "bind the whole world in golden chains around the feet of God"; this, this, is her glorious mission ! Her business is, not to choke investigation and thought, but to sift and examine them by her immutable standards ; not to denounce true science but to welcome and test it ; not to abuse gainsayers, but to lovingly convince and win them ; and above all to shew in life and conduct the *sternness of Christ against sin* and his *yearning love for the sinner* ; to exhibit in the dread pressure and grim struggle of life the consistent meekness of the Master ; to turn the other cheek to the fierce blow ; and never from angry passion or wounded self-love, by recrimination and violence of language or action, to show that the love of Christ does *not* constrain her, and that the principles she professes do not guide her children in practice.

But is the Church of God doing this to-day ? Is not the state of things such that thinking men ask whether there is any guidance at all ? Do not men enquire whether the Church of God exists ? And if so where ? Is it God's directing hand or man's weakness that has brought about the present complexity ? One church claims to be the sole repository of God's truth ; another so-called Church denies that there is a personal God at all. One Christian body falls down and worships the Queen of Heaven, another declares that neither the mother nor her Divine Son is to be so

regarded, for that they were but mere ordinary people. One denomination asserts the essential necessity of Christian Baptism as the entrance into Gods visible kingdom, another proclaims the Gospel and never mentions baptism at all, except to pour scorn and contempt upon those who conscientiously hold and teach that a soul is made one with God, an adopted child of God, by means of that Holy Sacrament. The other great Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord is by one section of Christendom ignored, its frequent attendance deemed a superstition, and its pretended powers a fraud ; to others it is the central act of worship, and the great means of union with Christ the Lord. One body declares that membership in the Visible Church is a necessity to salvation : another cries loudly that there is no visible Church, but that the true Church consists of all those who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, and that the signs of membership are invisible. One branch of Christendom maintains that there is an actual visible head of Christ's realm on earth, and calls upon all to obey his infallible judgments. Another answers that there is no visible head, no sacraments, no ministry, no outward laws, no such thing as infallible decisions, no creed, no forms, and no binding terms of union ! To one Christian the Word of God and his own interpretation of it are his only guide. To another the Bible is nothing more than a fortuitous assemblage of heterogeneous writings, much of which is false, some immoral, and of which he will take only what suits him and becomes true through his patronage and adoption. In the midst of this chaos of opinion is it not an unspeakable relief to remember that the Lord sitteth a King forever ?

But if He is, then is He not a King of order ? If He remaineth a King, must it not be over a Kingdom ?

The Lord Jesus Christ ere he ascended into Heaven founded a society which was to be world wide. Against the inertia of an effete but still powerful heathen philosophy the

new teaching of the law of love forced its gentle way. No sword devoured all its enemies before its face. No crimson tide of foemen's blood stained the passage of the Religion of the Divine Fatherhood. Slowly, steadily, working upwards from the lowly fishermen mending their nets to the cultured and accomplished officials of a court; from the slaves of Cæsar's household to the occupant of Cæsar's throne; the story of the Love of Christ won its unensanguined victories. The officers of Christ's Kingdom and the laws of his spiritual realm were little by little firmly established in the territories saved from the dominion of Satan; and the powers and methods of a system which, though in earthen vessels was not of this world, became fixed for all posterity. This Kingdom must be equipped with all things needed for its full development. It was no casual or temporary means that were employed under the Divine teaching of the great forty days to draw the nations gradually into the Gospel fold. Never was God the author of confusion. As the Bishop of Ripon says,* the three great principles of Christianity were Dependence, Fellowship and Progress. Dependence on the unseen God and Father, who by the Holy Ghost vivified and made instinct with Power every minister, every channel of grace, every publicle economy, every act of publicle and private devotion. Fellowship with the saints on earth and the Saviour in heaven. And Progress, a living force working in the world, in the van of human life and civilization, for the emancipation of the race from all that is low and unworthy, from the bondage of corruption to the glorious liberty of the children of God. These three elements human nature demands. Neither is sufficient without the others. Religion must be based upon a Person, not on a Creed, or a Code; and the binding and unifying influence that consolidates the whole is the personal Rule of a living Lord.

This regenerating force; this Society of noble ideals;

*Bampton lect. 1877.

this kingdom of peace and love ; thus inspired, equipped and sent forth, must if united be irresistible. *First* because the principles on which it is based are divine. *Second* because its conditions are craved by human nature, and *third* because in themselves these principles commend themselves to the human judgment and conscience. In so far as, and while, the Kingdom was one, its members at unity, its laws unrent, * its ranks unbroken, its leaders trusted and obeyed, *the world bowed and fell before the Cross.* Some fell upon the stone and were broken. Upon others the stone fell, and they were ground to powder. Three thousand were baptized in a day. Whole dominions were illuminated at once. The light of Gospel truth beamed forth, not from within a lantern which intercepted half its rays, but with the noonday brilliance of the eastern sun.

Then came the seed of tares. Doubtless sin yet reigned in human hearts. Temptations fierce and strong, raged with demoniac fury within men's souls. *They broke out into open rebellion.* Indulged individualism, that bitter and lasting curse of Christianity through all the ages, brought into action the hidden fires of disunion and strife. And then it came that the once bonded and irresistible truth was shattered into a hundred fragments. Then followed divided aims, enfeebled energies and crippled work. The powers bestowed on the Church of God for government and discipline were wrested to engines of oppression. Corruption reigned in high places. The rulers of the Church became lords over God's heritage. Liberties, crushed, arose fragrant from their bruises. The whole Church gradually presents the appearance of a mirror distorted and defaced. The gracious song of Love and Peace, of Fatherhood and Sonship, of sweet communion of spiritual intercourse, of glory to God, peace on earth, and good will to men, sounds now like swiftly fading echoes from a ** broken lyre dropped from a dead

*This simile is I believe the Bishop of Derry's, though I cannot quite remember where I read it.

man's hand." Angry reprimandation takes the place of the accents of concord. Intolerance that can see no good in any thing that differs from men's own convictions has been exchanged for the lowliness that esteems others better than oneself. Internal warfare, fierce and furious, takes the place too often of kindly forbearance, brotherly conciliation, and calm reflection. Work is spoiled, energy is wasted, money is worse than thrown away, splendid opportunities of winning, as at the first, whole realms for Christ, are marred, lost, by the wrangling of opposing forces, mutual jealousies, and disingenuous misrepresentation.

O brethren beloved in Christ, is this the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus? Can the cause of GOD be served thus? Christendom, needs its sackcloth and ashes, its garb of deepest penitence, and with these the agony of supplication for a return of the first love, for the repetition of the first works!

For the enemy is thundering at the gates! The sound of conquest in the air. The armies of darkness are lining out their cohorts, and the deadly weapons are burnished anew. Unbelief lifts its unblushing head. Intemperance scorches our best and noblest. Impurity presses on its serpent fangs till our Christian literature is saturated with it. Black Atheism, peering from eyeless sockets, stretches out its skeleton fingers eager for their prey, over the rising generation. A soulless anarchy, destroying for destruction's sake, heedless of suffering so that only *dread* sink into men's lives: these and such as these are the foes whose trenches are already dug, whose parallels are even now drawn, and whose mines are ever exploding! And the Church of God is quarreling while the souls of her children perish, and the blood of the vanquished and dying, over all the sounds of pious discord cries aloud to God!

Does it not come like a blessing from angel's lips, like a breath from the infinite calm,

THE LORD SITTETH ABOVE THE WATERFLOOD, AND THE LORD
REMAINFETH A KING FOR EVER !

This is the state of the Church at large. But should the test be applied to the condition of our Branch of universal christendom, do we see anything very different ? It would not become one appointed to speak here to-day to his brethren, many of them more learned, more experienced, and more spiritual than himself, to refer too pointedly or in a fault-finding vein, to evils only alas ! too glaringly apparent. But I appeal to you, brethren in the Lord and in the sacred ministry of the gospel of Christ, do not our finances languish, our missions stagnate, our benevolent efforts sink to slumber, while we war among ourselves ? Is it not possible, may it not for Christ's sake be accomplished, that we each do our work, and use our best efforts in the Masters holy cause, the winning of our souls, the rescuing them from death eternal, the commanding to them the burning love of the Lord who bought us, the drawing them with cords of undying affection, without forgetting that in Him we are one ?

To our own Master we stand or fall. Our conscience is His voice, and He would not have us do violence to its dictates. But party names, and party strife, and the imputation of bad motives, and the cruel stab in the back given in the dark by the anonymous writer, can they be compatible with the even handed justice and transparency of Truth ? Our Church is to us as the apple of our eye. Her roots are struck deep into the soil of Time, which is the soil of Truth. She cannot be overthrown while her candlestick is there. But do we not tempt the Lord, by unbrotherliness and refusal to make any allowances for honest difference of opinion in a Church which is the freest and yet the most definite in the world, to take that candlestick away ?

THE LORD SHALL GIVE STRENGTH UNTO HIS PEOPLE : THE
LORD SHALL GIVE HIS PEOPLE THE BLESSING OF PEACE.

Yea to *His people* ; to them that study His inner laws,

reflect His holiness, and set forth his benign and gentle calmness, the Lord giveth ever His strength.

How long shall it take His Church to find out that violence is never strength ? that supercilious pride and the contempt that is born of self-conceit, only provokes resentment ? How long shall religion be weakened, enervated, by proud assumptions of superiority, oftenest by those whose claims to it are least ? There is force in the mighty tempest, which carries death and destruction far and wide. There is force in the devastating pestilence, which chills the land with deadly fear, and leaves homes and hearts desolate. But what is all this beside the silent power of the summer sun, by which all nature is irresistibly drawn into life and vigour ; whose magnetic attraction naught can stay, which gives vitality every where, and compels every living thing to offer its best and perfect its destiny ?

The Lord will give *strength* to His people.

Yes ! forever yes !

The strength that is born of a good conscience, that comes from a sense of right, that stands on the foundation of safety. The Church of God ever represents the things that *cannot be shaken*. The world's greatest engines of disruption have been used to crush her offered truth ; the flesh and the devil have exhausted their wiles, and have been prodigal of their devices to overwhelm her struggling children. But in spite of wild criticism which is ever changing its front and altering its mind ; in the face of defection and weak abandonment of outworks ; the central dogmas of christianity, to the maintenance of which the Church is pledged, stand unshaken still. Belief in a personal God ; the existence and accountability of the soul ; the sense of sin ; the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ ; the establishing of the Church as the instrument of the salvation of men ; the holy ministry of reconciliation, the sacraments, the hope of heaven and the prospect of undying service and unbroken harmony in the life to

come : these are the elements of a strength that is lasting, that knows no fear because it is perfect in love. It is a strength that will endure, that is willing to suffer, that can bear the strain of injustice, that is not moved by desertion, that triumphs over malice, that is above petty spite, that never recriminates, that gathers ever strength from the same eternal source, and that is exercised more and more by forgiving !

Such a Church as this, and such Christians as these, can afford to be large-hearted !

Finally. The Lord shall bless His people with *Peace*.

Not the peace of corruption, as of dead bodies which make no stir. Not the peace of indifference, which, Gallio-like, cares for none of these things. Not the peace of indolence, which takes its ease and quietly watches the world perish. Not the peace of dependence, which is incapable of decision, and is always anxious that some one else should take the responsibility. Not the peace of ignorance, which rushes for shelter to the spreading tree while the lightning flashes are eager for their victim. Not the peace of the fanatic, who in bigoted security looks with unconcern on others who he thinks are going to be damned while he shall enjoy the green pastures of God's paradise. Not the peace of stagnation which settles on its lees, yet carries in its bosom the germs of death. Not the peace of success, which, to last, must be ever succeeded by fresh attempts and victories new.

No : none of these.

But the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Peace, not necessarily in outward guise, but deep repose of soul, that nought of earth can disturb : not unbroken ease, but the stillness of acceptance in the Beloved, the perfect peace of him whose mind is stayed on God.

Such peace God will give to His Church. Should it not be

prayed for? can it not be cultivated? Energetic work, great charity towards others, persistence in what has been proved to be of God, faithfulness to vows, an unquenchable passion for souls, and above all abstention from the rabidness and injustice of party strife, this will crown the Church with a halo of glory whose soft rays betoken God's peace. What then are occasional lapses of individuals not strong enough to be men; what are the passing phases of man's impatience; what the little trials of our faith? Fifty or a hundred years is but a small period in the history of God's Church. The bitterest champions of opposition and malevolence will soon pass away. The mushroom growths which seem so successful but which are founded on uninstructed zeal spring up and wither in a night.

But the peace which Jehovah gives to His people is the direct result of His strength. The Church may have to work on as well as to wait. Work is easy; patience is hard. Let us be at peace, provoking one another only to good works. Let us seek strength from Jehovah, the strength only that can dare to be magnanimous. So shall Jehovah that commandeth the waters, the Glorious God that maketh the thunder, Whose voice is mighty in operation, shall to His people give His everlasting STRENGTH: so shall Jehovah give His people the blessing of PEACE.



